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The  
American Historical Review

POLITICAL SCIENCE AND HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

*Mr. President, Colleagues and Guests :*

The subject assigned to me is so comprehensive, and the time allowed me in which to develop it is so short, that I can waste no words upon an introduction, or in an apology for the necessarily brief and fragmentary treatment of the theme, but must plunge at once into the midst of things.

In order to define the relation between history and political science, we must fix, with some degree of clearness and exactness, the meaning of these terms. If we can succeed in doing this the relation between the concepts which they represent will, in fact, need little further explanation.

Few persons, either professional or lay, are conscious of the difficulty of setting up the metes and bounds to the realm of knowledge designated by the name "history," until they actually undertake to do so. The proposition may even be hazarded that few persons have ever confronted themselves with this problem at all. Unfortunately for the right cultivation of historical knowledge, and the true application of historical wisdom, everybody assumes to know what history is, and to declare what it teaches. People do not dare to take such liberties with mathematics or chemistry or physics, and yet the real meaning of history is far more profound than the facts and principles of these sciences, and has been correctly apprehended by far fewer persons.

I have been a constant student of history for more than a quarter of a century, and yet I have never heard or read a definition of history, or a delimitation of the realm of knowledge which the word designates, that was satisfactory to me, and I am sure that I am unable to frame or trace any such. If I can arrive at a remote approxi-

<sup>1</sup> A paper read before the American Historical Association, December 30, 1896.

mation to anything satisfactory, either to you or to myself, it is all that I can hope for, and it is more than I expect.

I have no time for criticism upon the propositions advanced by others in regard to this subject. I will address myself, at once, to the consideration of those categories of thought which must, in my opinion, be applied in working out the true conception of history.

In the first place, the phenomena of history must be conceived under the category of time, that is, in the order of antecedent and consequent. This requirement alone, however, will not distinguish history from any other body of knowledge, not even from natural science. Anything and everything which the human mind conceives must be formed in the moulds of time. If we apply this category of thought alone to phenomena we may call the result statistics or chronology, or narrative, perhaps, but not history, nor yet even natural science.

In the second place, therefore, the phenomena of history must be conceived under the category of cause and effect. This requirement demands a much more serious and exact mental effort than the first. While, undoubtedly, great mental acumen is necessary to distinguish fact from fiction in the fleeting world of phenomena, still, much higher intellectual qualities are indispensable in correctly apprehending this most fundamental relation of cause and effect. Not yet, however, have we reached the test which distinguishes history from many other realms of knowledge. The observations and experiments of the physicists are made as rigidly subject to this logical category, in the discovery of the truths of natural science, as are the experiences of mankind, in winning an insight into the truths of history. We must, therefore, still find another form of thought, by whose applications the facts and relations which belong to history shall be separated from those which do not, and shall be made intelligible, both in themselves and in the ultimate purpose towards which they tend.

This form of thought, which furnishes, at last, the crucial test that we are seeking is, as I understand history, the category of self-progression. In nature the chain of events returns into itself; what has happened will happen again; but in history the significant thing is the increment which we discover in succeeding events. In history what has happened once in the life of a given people ought never to happen again exactly as it happened before. If it does it indicates either that where it so happens history is, as to what underlies that event at least, not being made, or that it is being unmade; and historical wisdom does not consist simply in knowing what has happened under given conditions, but also, and I may say, chiefly,

in correctly apprehending the variations, however slight, in the ever-changing conditions, and the accretions in the succeeding events produced thereby. In a word, historical wisdom is the true basis of progress, and it is comparatively worthless, is, in fact, not historical wisdom, unless it produces the spirit of true progress.

Regarding, now, phenomena from the point of view of the requirement imposed upon them by the category of self-progression, we arrive at the conclusions: first, that the substance of history is spirit, since only spirit possesses the creative power of making the consequent contain more than the antecedent, of making the effect an advance upon the cause; second, that the substance of history is human spirit, since progress can be predicated only to the finite and the imperfect; and third, that the events which are true historical facts are those creations of the human spirit which are the symbols of its advance towards its own perfection.

History, in the making, is, therefore, the progressive realization of the ideals of the human spirit in all of the objective forms of their manifestation, in language, tradition and literature, in customs, manners, laws and institutions, and in opinion and belief. And history, in the writing, is the true and faithful record of these progressive revelations of the human reason, as they mark the line and stages of advance made by the human race towards its ultimate perfection. I do not mean by this that there can be no retrogression in the experience of a given part of the human race, and no record of such a decline. Many are the races of men whose powers have been expended in the march of human progress. But the torch of history has been handed from one to another, as each exhausted bearer has ceased to be the representative of human progress. When this great catastrophe happens in the life of a portion of the human race that portion really ceases to make history; it really, thereafter, unmakes history. Its experiences, thereafter, are material for tragedy and romance, rather than for history.

Now what is political science? Etymologically the phrase means the science of municipal government, and that was what it actually was among the classic peoples who bore the civilization of the world in the period before the Roman Empire. That period of the world's history was the period of city states, states in which all citizens participated immediately in the government. The Roman imperium inaugurated the period of country states; and the period in which we live is the period of national country states. The essential difference in principle between the country state and the city state is that the government of the country state is representative, while that of the classical city state was immediate. And the essen-

tial difference in principle between the national country state and the country state merely, is that the former is necessarily either democratic or so broadly aristocratic as to be very nearly democratic, while the latter may be either monarchic or aristocratic, but hardly democratic.

Political science in its present meaning is, therefore, the science of the national country state, and is tending to become the science of the human world state. Its problem is, therefore, something far more comprehensive than the science of immediate municipal government, or of representative municipal government, or even of government in general. The modern requirements of territorial extension, representative government and national unity have made political science not only the science of government in general, but also the science of liberty and the science of sovereignty.

Political science now consists of a doctrine of sovereignty, a doctrine of liberty and a doctrine of government. And modern constitutional law consists of a series of provisions designating the members of the sovereign body and prescribing its mode of action, defining and guaranteeing the realm of individual liberty, and constructing the organs of government and vesting in them the powers which they may lawfully exercise. In other words, constitutional law is but the more or less perfect objective realization of the doctrines of political science. Now, not only is the process of casting the principles of these doctrines or theories into the objective forms and institutions of positive law an historical process and movement, but the doctrines themselves are largely an historical product. Centuries of experience in the practices of government and the customs of liberty antedate, and lead up to, the awakening of the consciousness of the political idea. Roughly speaking, we may affirm that the formulation of the political idea, political science, was first really accomplished, in post-Roman Europe, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of the Christian era. Twelve centuries, thus, of practical education in regard to the force and the freedom which society requires, in order to work out the problem of human civilization, were necessary to rouse philosophical reflection upon the political idea, the state, to the degree of clearness and distinctness which must be attained before the products of reflection can take on the form of propositions, and these propositions be arranged into a body of science. Nor was this result attained *then* perfectly and for all time. The productions of those who may, in a sense, be termed the founders of modern political science, Grotius, Pufendorf, Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau and the rest, were naturally crude and fragmentary; and while their theories exercised a modifying in-

fluence upon existing political systems, they have themselves suffered changes and adjustments in the hands of the more modern publicists, as suggested by a longer and broader experience of the human race in government, law and liberty. And although political science has now approached a stage of completeness where we can speak of it as the basis of constitutional law, still its propositions are being continually modified and readjusted by new practical experiences. It is leading them at one moment, and being led by them at another, its genesis and development thus fulfilling all of the requirements of a true historical process.

But how much of history is political science, and how much of political science is history? Are the two identical; or is there some history that is not political science, and is there an element in political science which is not history? In a lecture delivered to his students in the year 1885, and recently published to the world under the editorial supervision of Professor Sidgwick, the late Professor J. R. Seeley said that history "is the name of a residuum which has been left when one group of facts after another has been taken possession of by some science; that the residuum which now exists must go the way of the rest, and that the time is not very distant when a science will take possession of the facts which are still the undisputed property of the historian;" and that the science will be political science.

Now, although this seems extravagant, yet it is much nearer the truth than most men will allow before serious reflection, because most men do not appreciate how large the body of facts belonging to political science is. Most men instinctively feel that the facts of political science are facts about government only, while, as we have seen, political science now also comprehends the facts about sovereignty and liberty.

National popular sovereignty, the basis both of government and of liberty, is the most fundamental principle of modern political science. Now the development of this principle, and its objective realization in constitutional law, is the most complex and comprehensive of all the movements of history. It involves facts about race, language, tradition, custom, literature, ethics, philosophy and religion, in addition to those more commonly considered as belonging to the exhibitions of force and power. It is nothing less than the historical evolution of a consensus of opinion among the people of a country concerning the fundamental principles of government and liberty, and the objective realization of that opinion as supreme law. Now, while no one will question that the latter part of this process exhibits facts which belong to political science, it is not so readily and in-

stinctively appreciated that the former part does also. It is, however, as strictly true in the one case as in the other. The only difference is that in the one case the facts do not belong as exclusively to political science as in the other. They are facts which are used as well by other sciences and disciplines.

Again, the constitutional liberty of the individual is a principle of modern political science of nearly equal importance with the principle of government itself. While, however, men regarded individual liberty as a body of natural rights, the facts about it were scarcely conceived as being facts of political science at all. Indeed, the doctrine of natural rights was one which made individual liberty a condition of original perfection rather than a product of history even. Here, then, is another large body of facts which has only recently been conceded to belong to political science. This body of facts makes up a very large portion of modern European and American history especially. If it belonged *exclusively* to political science the dictum of Professor Seeley would be nearer to the truth than it is. But it seems to me that it does not. It seems to me that the idea of civil or individual liberty must be distinguished into two parts. The one part is the idea of the immunity of the individual, in a certain sphere, against the force and control of government. The other part is the right of the individual to be protected in a certain sphere by government against encroachment from any other quarter. Now the first part may be fairly regarded as a principle of political science exclusively, and the facts relating to it as facts of political science mainly. But the latter part of it involves principles of private law, political economy and sociology as well, and the facts in regard to it belong as well to these bodies of knowledge as to political science. And the whole idea of liberty, as a concept of political science, must be carefully distinguished from the ethical idea of liberty, as the voluntary fulfillment of the perfect law. The two ideas are related to each other, as negative is to positive. The political idea is the prevention of force within a certain sphere of individual autonomy. The ethical idea is the voluntary conduct of the individual within that sphere according to the principles of right reason; and the immunity contained in the ethical idea is an immunity against error and sin. As the ethical idea is more and more fully realized in the conduct of men within the given sphere of individual autonomy, that sphere may be, and will be, enlarged by the state. That is, the state will do less by government and more by liberty, as it becomes manifest that immunity from compulsion is resulting in and promoting the voluntary regulation of individual conduct by the principles of right reason.

Now, therefore, while some of the facts which relate to the ethical idea of liberty are facts that must be made use of by political science, most of them are facts which more properly belong to the history of the intellectual, ethical and religious progress of man. Many of these facts have, according to Professor Seeley's view, been appropriated by psychology, ethics and theology; and the residue may, in greater or less degree, be appropriated by political science, in so far as this has not already happened. Still, I think, from this discussion it will appear that there is a vast number of the facts of human experience which cannot be *exclusively* claimed by any science as yet developed, and which will not be rightly so claimed by political science, even under the expanded idea of that science which at present prevails. Now, this body of facts must be brought together, in order that the relations which they express may be examined from all points of view and fully comprehended; and I do not see what designation can be given to such a body of knowledge with so much propriety as the title "history."

While, then, we concede that political science may rightfully appropriate a much larger part of history than is, at first view, usually supposed, we are not convinced that political science will, within the appreciable future, take all of history not exclusively appropriated by other sciences.

When mankind shall have reached that fulness of experience which shall enable it to become completely conscious of itself, it may then be able to turn all of its knowledge into science, and history may then be said to have done its work. But I fancy that, when that far-distant day shall have been reached and the historian shall be no longer needed, the retirement of the political scientist also will not be greatly delayed. Until then the arranging of the facts of history in the forms and conclusions of science will only lift history to a higher plane, as the experiences of mankind approach more nearly the ideals and the goal of civilization.

Lastly, there is one more question which I have posed and not yet answered, namely: Is all political science history? or is there an element in political science which cannot be classed under that title? I think the latter part of this question must be answered in the affirmative. Political science consists of something more than facts and logical conclusions from facts. It contains an element of philosophical speculation which, when true and correct, is the forerunner of history. When political facts and conclusions come into contact with political reason they awaken in that reason a consciousness of political ideals not yet realized. Thrown into the form of propositions these ideals become principles of political science, then



articles of political creeds, and, at last, laws and institutions. Now while this speculative element in political science must be kept in constant, truthful and vital connection with the historical component, and must be, in a certain very important sense, regulated by the historical component, it is, nevertheless, the most important element in political science, because it lights the way of progress, and directs human experience towards its ultimate purpose. It is the element most exposed to error and to fancy, but it is the only element again which mediates the adjustment of the actual to the ideal, and without it political science would not differ essentially from public law.

My conclusion is, therefore, that while there are parts of history which are not political science, and while there is an element in political science which is not strictly history, yet the two spheres so lap over one another and interpenetrate each other that they cannot be distinctly separated. Political science must be studied historically and history must be studied politically, in order to a correct comprehension of either. Separate them, and the one becomes a cripple, if not a corpse, the other a will-o'-the-wisp.

JOHN W. BURGESS.